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Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

Security Council
Sixty-first year

Letter dated 6 October 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the report of the twenty-fourth ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, which was held from 25 to 29 September 2006 in Kigali, Rwanda (see annex).

On behalf of the Chairman of the Committee, I am transmitting attached hereto the report adopted at the conclusion of the meeting.

I should like to request you to have this letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 91 (g), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Joseph **Nsengimana**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 6 October 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa
Report of the twenty-fourth ministerial meeting
Kigali, Republic of Rwanda, 25-29 September 2006

Introduction

1. The twenty-fourth ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa was held in Kigali, Republic of Rwanda, from 25 to 29 September 2006.

2. All member States took part in the meeting: the Republic of Angola, the Republic of Burundi, the Republic of Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Chad, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the Gabonese Republic, Republic of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe.

3. The opening ceremony featured:

- A message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, read out by Ms. Bintou Keita, Acting Resident Coordinator for the United Nations in Rwanda;
- A message from the Secretary-General of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), read out by Mr. Nelson Cosme, Under-Secretary-General for Human Integration, Peace, Security and Stability.

4. The opening address was delivered by Ms. Nyirahabimana Solina, Minister to the Office of the President of the Republic of Rwanda, and the closing address was delivered by General Marcel Gatsinzi, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Rwanda.

Summary of proceedings

Adoption of the agenda

5. The Committee adopted the following agenda:

(a) Adoption of the agenda of the twenty-fourth ministerial meeting.

(b) Election of the Bureau.

(c) Briefing by the host country.

(d) Report of the outgoing Bureau, submitted by its Chairman.

(e) Review of the geopolitical and security situation in some States members of the Committee:

(i) Burundi;

(ii) Central African Republic;

(iii) Republic of Chad;

(iv) Democratic Republic of the Congo;

(v) Consideration of the Darfur crisis and its impact on member countries of the Committee.

(f) Inter-State security cooperation among the Central African countries:

(i) Strengthening of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX);

(ii) Review of preparations for the Bahr-el-Ghazal joint military exercise;

(iii) Measures to combat trans-border crime.

(g) Promotion of disarmament and arms limitation programmes in Central Africa:

(i) Exchange of experience in the implementation of programmes for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants in Central Africa;

(ii) Implementation in Central Africa of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects;

(iii) Participation of ECCAS in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and in the standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures;

(iv) Implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) in Central Africa;

(v) Establishment of a subregional disarmament mechanism in Central Africa.

(h) Report of the activities of the ECCAS secretariat in the areas of peace and security; progress report on the early warning mechanism for Central Africa (MARAC) study.

(i) Review of the draft resolution on the activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

(j) Exchange of views on methods of work and the programme of work: revitalization of the activities of the Advisory Committee and adoption of the Committee's programme of work for the period 2006-2007.

(k) Date and place of the next meeting.

(l) Other matters.

(m) Adoption of the report of the twenty-fourth ministerial meeting.

Election of the Bureau

6. The Committee elected a Bureau comprised of the following countries:

– Chairman: Rwanda

– First Vice-Chairman: Sao Tome and Principe

– Second Vice-Chairman: Angola

– Rapporteur: Gabon

I. Report of the outgoing Bureau, submitted by its Chairman

7. The Committee noted with interest the report on the activities of the outgoing Bureau, submitted by its Chairman. It commended the dynamism with which the Bureau had performed its duties and, in particular, its active contribution, in cooperation with the secretariat, to the preparation and organization of the twenty-fourth ministerial meeting.

II. Review of the geopolitical and security situation in some States members of the Committee

8. Overall, developments in the situation in Central Africa, particularly in the countries covered by this geopolitical and security review, have been positive since the Committee's previous meeting. Despite a few armed confrontations here and there and a worrying humanitarian and human rights situation, steady progress has been achieved in the peace processes under way in the region, and multiparty elections were held in Sao Tome, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad and Gabon.

9. The fragility of these processes, as was seen once again in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, nonetheless requires that the parties concerned, the other countries of the subregion and the international community redouble their efforts to usher in a new era of development for peoples who have been victims of the scourge of war for too many years.

Republic of Burundi

10. The Committee welcomed the progress achieved in the situation in Burundi, in particular:

(a) The signature on 7 September 2006 in Dar-es-Salam of a ceasefire agreement between the Government of Burundi and Mr. Agathon Rwasa's Forces nationales de libération (Palipehutu-FNL);

(b) Efforts to improve relations between the Government and the media, relations between political parties and relations with civil society;

(c) The adoption of measures to deal with the issues of political prisoners and prison overcrowding, in particular, the establishment of a commission to identify political prisoners, and the decision of the President of the Republic to release them;

(d) Pursuit of the disarmament and demobilization process and progress achieved in disbanding militias.

11. The Committee took note of the explanations provided by the delegation of Burundi concerning the recent arrest of political figures and, further noted that the files on these cases are with the courts, which will reach a verdict shortly. It reiterated the appeal made by the Security Council to the Government and to all parties to preserve the peace and national reconciliation and to promote social harmony.

12. The Committee took note of the request for gradual withdrawal, made by the Government in November 2005 to the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB) in view of the improvement in the country's overall situation. It noted, however, that during the reporting period, clashes between Government and FNL forces continued and sometimes led to human rights violations; however, this situation changed with the signature of the ceasefire agreement of 7 September 2006 between the belligerents.

13. It welcomed the measures taken by the Government of Burundi to prosecute the perpetrators of human rights violations and urged it to bring to justice, without exception, anyone guilty of such acts. It also expressed the hope that the peace accord between the Government of Burundi and FNL would lead to better security conditions and better protection of human rights.

14. It then urged the Government to continue its efforts to restore lasting peace in the country. It also commended the leaders of the Great Lakes region initiative to bring peace to Burundi and urged them to strengthen their support with a view to concluding the peace process in the country.

15. The Committee also welcomed the excellent bilateral cooperation between the National Defence and Security Forces of Burundi and both the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Rwandan Defence Forces, with a view to dealing more effectively with such problems as border security, refugee flows and asylum-seekers.

16. With regard to socio-economic matters, it encouraged the Government to continue its efforts to tackle the country's acute socio-economic problems and resolve serious conflicts over land ownership and use. He launched an urgent appeal to the international donor community to honour its pledges of budgetary support to Burundi's emergency and rehabilitation programme, and to its economic recovery and development programme. It also stressed the need for the international community to provide Burundi all necessary support for the rapid conclusion of its programme for the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants.

17. The Committee once again encouraged the Government to continue its efforts to bring about immediate improvements in such areas as good governance and respect for human rights and to pursue the major political, economic and security-related reforms it has undertaken. It invited regional actors, bilateral partners and the United Nations to give it their full support to that end.

Central African Republic

18. The Committee encouraged the Central African authorities and all political actors to continue to support dialogue, resolve their differences peacefully and make every effort to strengthen peace and democracy in the country. It welcomed the convening on 28 July 2006 of the national dialogue on peace and security at the initiative of the Head of State, with the participation of all organs of State, political

parties and civil society, the diplomatic corps and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

19. It expressed concern at the deterioration of the security situation in the Central African Republic, in particular:

(a) The activities of armed gangs, "road blockers" and rebels in the north of the country, who committed abuses against civilians;

(b) Armed groups' repeated violations of territorial integrity in the north, north-east and north-west of the country;

(c) The proliferation of small arms and light weapons, particularly in the north-east;

(d) The growing number of abuses and murders, hold-ups, armed robberies and attacks by road blockers.

20. It appealed to the international community to give the country the support necessary to secure its borders and improve the overall security situation, notably by increasing the capacities of the Central African Armed Forces (FACA). It also welcomed the contribution of the Multinational Force (FOMUC) of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) to efforts to restore peace and security in the Central African Republic and urged the international community to support FOMUC, so that its troop strength could be increased to help the Central African Republic tackle the lack of security in the country. In that connection, it welcomed the European Union's decision to continue funding FOMUC until 30 June 2007.

21. The Committee also expressed concern at the steady deterioration of the humanitarian and human rights situation in the Central African Republic as a result of the insecurity caused by armed rebel movements and retaliatory actions by FACA.

22. In the socio-economic sphere, the Committee appealed to bilateral and multilateral donors and international financial institutions to pay special attention to the economic and financial situation of the Central African Republic and to provide it with the necessary support.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

23. The Committee welcomed the significant progress made in the implementation of the transition process, including the successful completion of the electoral process with the holding of legislative elections and the first round of presidential elections on 30 July 2006. It welcomed the political, financial, technical and logistical efforts made by the international community in that regard and congratulated the Congolese people on their maturity and sense of civic responsibility.

24. The Committee expressed profound concern at the violent clashes that had taken place on 20, 21 and 22 August 2006 between the Republican Guard and Vice-President Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo's security guards, in which at least 40 people had been killed, including 30 police officers. It urged the country's political leaders to ensure that the electoral process continued calmly, peacefully and responsibly and encouraged them to give priority to conciliation and harmony in the best interests of

the Congolese people. In that connection, it welcomed the 13 September 2006 meeting between President Joseph Kabila Kabange and Vice-President Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo.

25. The Committee expressed concern at the slow pace of the integration of the armed forces, gaps in the "brassage" process, failings by the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (CONADER) in implementing the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and the difficulties encountered by the Transitional Government in setting up all the integrated brigades that had been envisaged.

26. Although the security situation had improved in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a result of the joint operations carried out by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and MONUC, which had made it possible to contain and disarm the militias, the Committee expressed profound concern at the ongoing abuses committed by some of those militias in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and northern Katanga, which continued to adversely affect civilians' lives by aggravating an already precarious humanitarian situation.

27. At the subregional level and in the framework of the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission, the Committee encouraged the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda to continue their efforts to cooperate more closely in combating the armed groups on their common borders.

28. The Committee expressed concern at the persistence of allegations of serious violations of the human rights of civilians, particularly following the military operations in Ituri and northern Katanga. It welcomed the measures taken by the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to combat impunity and urged them to pursue such measures, ensuring that everyone guilty of such violations was, without distinction, prosecuted.

29. The Committee urged the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to implement a comprehensive policy, in conjunction with the United Nations and its partners, to address the humanitarian crisis in the country. In particular, it enjoined donors generously to support the 2006 Democratic Republic of the Congo Action Plan, launched on 13 February 2006 in Brussels and Kinshasa, which provided a clear, realistic framework for solving the ongoing humanitarian problems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Republic of Chad

30. The Committee expressed concern at the persistence of political crises and the deterioration of the security situation in Chad as a result both of the boycott of the presidential election and the political dialogue by opposition political parties of the so-called Convention des partis politiques pour la défense de la Constitution (CPDC) and of the blatant attacks on Chad by armed groups (December 2005 and April 2006). It welcomed the peaceful conduct of the 3 May 2006 presidential election and the holding of the political dialogue organized from 28 July to 2 August at the initiative of President Idriss Déby Itno.

31. It encouraged the Government of Chad to continue its efforts to hold a dialogue with all political sectors and welcomed its undertaking to revise the electoral rolls, as demanded by participants in the dialogue, and to transform the

resolutions emanating from that political dialogue into laws and regulations. It urged all political parties to give priority to dialogue and conciliation in order to reduce tensions and calm the political climate in Chad.

32. The Committee expressed concern at the threats posed to Chad's security and stability by the activities of Chadian rebel groups based in Darfur and at the tensions which that situation was creating between Chad and the Sudan. At the same time, it welcomed the efforts made by Chad and the Sudan to normalize their relations, including the visit to Khartoum by Chad's Minister for Foreign Affairs and the signing on 8 August 2006, on the occasion of the inauguration of President Idriss Deby Itno, of a communiqué stating that the Heads of State of the two countries had decided to settle their differences through the immediate normalization of their diplomatic and economic relations. It encouraged them to put into effect the various peace agreements concluded between the two countries.

33. The Committee nevertheless expressed profound concern that the Darfur crisis might spread to the other countries of the subregion and it condemned the acts of violence perpetrated against refugees, displaced persons, civilian populations and humanitarian workers in eastern Chad. It appealed to the international community and the United Nations to help the Government of Chad ensure the safety of refugees from Darfur living in camps in Chad, provide greater assistance to them and guarantee the camps' neutrality. Lastly, it welcomed the holding in N'Djaména of two special conferences of CEMAC heads of State to consider the security situation in the Central African subregion and the threats to Chad's stability.

III. Consideration of the Darfur crisis and its impact on member countries of the Committee

34. The Committee noted with profound concern information about the deterioration of the situation in Darfur and its far-reaching consequences for regional security, including:

(a) The influx of refugees and the deteriorating security situation in countries of the region;

(b) The growth of illegal cross-border movements of weapons and persons;

(c) The worsening environmental and security situation in areas close to the border, which seriously endangered civilians, displaced persons and refugees;

(d) The threats to the stability, security and territorial integrity of the Sudan's neighbours, particularly the Central African Republic and Chad;

(e) The growing risk that the area where the three countries' borders met would become an area of unrest likely to attract more armed groups, mercenaries and rebels ready to take part in any action to destabilize the countries of the subregion.

35. The Committee appealed to the international community to increase its efforts to ensure that the borders between Chad, the Central African Republic and the Sudan were properly secured and that assistance to refugees and displaced persons, the main victims of hostilities in the region, was increased. In that connection, it encouraged the steps taken by the United Nations and the African Union to deploy a

United Nations peacekeeping operation in Darfur. It also acknowledged the necessity of the subregional approach, involving all the Central African States, advocated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations for stabilizing that area.

36. To that end, the Committee recommended the early convening of a subregional conference to look for ways of solving cross-border security problems in Central Africa. It appealed to the secretariat of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to contribute to efforts to raise the necessary funds for organizing that conference.

IV. Inter-State security cooperation among the Central African countries

Strengthening of COPAX

37. The Committee took note of the briefing by the ECCAS secretariat on the efforts made to strengthen the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX), including:

(a) The organization by ECCAS of regular statutory meetings of the Defence and Security Commission, which had allowed progress to be made in putting in place regional defence and security structures, notably the Multinational Force for Central Africa (FOMAC) and the Central African Early Warning Mechanism (MARAC);

(b) The launching in July 2006 of the activities of the officers constituting the regional Joint Chiefs of Staff, comprising a regional Chief of Staff (Congo), regional Deputy Chiefs of Staff for planning, operations and training (Cameroon), logistics (Chad), personnel, budget and finance (Equatorial Guinea) and information and communication systems (Democratic Republic of the Congo), an assistant to the regional Chief of Staff responsible for information (Burundi), and officers responsible for report writing and support staff (Gabon);

(c) The ongoing installation of the joint core of the Chiefs of Staff of the brigade, comprising a core Chief (Angola), a G1 officer (Central African Republic), a G2 officer (Rwanda) and a G3 officer (São Tome and Principe);

(d) The existence in most member States of the units that will make up the regional standby brigade (BRA);

(e) The ECCAS secretariat's regular participation throughout the preparatory process for the RECAMP 5 multinational exercise which it was organizing jointly with France.

38. It appealed to the ECCAS member countries to continue working to strengthen COPAX to enable it to play a leading role in Central Africa, notably through the application by all ECCAS member States of the decision on the community integration contribution (CCI) and through the payment of contributions to the ECCAS budget.

Review of preparations for the Bahr-el-Gazal joint military exercise

39. The Committee noted with interest the information provided by the Chadian delegation on the reasons that had led to the postponement of the Bahr-el-Gazal

joint military exercise, which was to have taken place in November 2005. It urged countries that had not yet done so to pay their contributions in full as soon as possible so that the preparatory work could continue and the exercise could be held in November 2007.

Measures to combat trans-border crime

40. The Committee expressed profound concern at the information on the aggravation of border security problems in the subregion and the growth of trans-border crime. It encouraged member countries to continue their efforts to tackle such crime and, inter alia, to develop a concerted subregional approach, the preparation of which could be considered in the context of the planned subregional conference on the question. It also noted the information on the tripartite meetings held in 2005 in Cameroon among Chad, the Central African Republic and Cameroon, under the aegis of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the Central African Republic, with a view to adopting measures to combat trans-border crime.

V. Promotion of disarmament and arms limitation programmes in Central Africa

Exchange of experience in the implementation of programmes for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants in Central Africa

41. During the exchanges of experience among delegations on the programmes for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants being implemented in their respective countries, the Committee welcomed the progress made in this regard in Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad and the Republic of Rwanda, in particular through the collection and destruction of large quantities of arms as well as the demobilization and reintegration of numerous former combatants, including child soldiers. It encouraged the countries concerned to continue their efforts in that area and to be guided by their respective experiences.

42. The Committee nevertheless expressed its profound concern regarding the obvious lack of funds necessary for launching or effectively executing these programmes in the countries of the subregion that are emerging from conflict situations. It felt that the excessive delays and many imbalances affecting the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes as a result of the lack of funds, which entailed real risks of engendering renewed clashes, may jeopardize the immense efforts made to restore peace, security and development in the countries concerned.

43. The Committee launched an urgent appeal:

(a) To the member countries emerging from conflict situations to make the necessary efforts to ensure the harmonious and effective implementation of the programmes for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants;

(b) To the international community and, in particular, donors to provide substantial support to the countries concerned to enable them to execute the programmes according to schedule.

Implementation in Central Africa of the Programme of Priority Activities adopted in 2003 at the end of the Brazzaville seminar on the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

44. The Committee noted with interest the reports submitted by the member countries on the execution of the Programme of Priority Activities adopted at the end of the Brazzaville seminar on the implementation in Central Africa of the United Nations Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons.

45. It also welcomed the actions and initiatives taken by the member countries within the framework of implementing both the Brazzaville Programme of Priority Activities and the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, in particular:

(a) The adoption of legislation suppressing violations linked to the possession or the illicit marketing of small arms and light weapons;

(b) The formation of units specialized in combating large-scale banditry and illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and strengthening the means placed at the disposal of the existing structures;

(c) The organization by the security forces of operations for the collection of illegal arms, particularly in border areas;

(d) The establishment of national commissions and the setting up of national focal points with the task of coordinating efforts to fight the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons;

(e) The exchange of information with the security services of neighbouring countries and the organization of joint actions on the borders;

(f) The organization of activities for training or awareness-raising on issues relating to the proliferation of and illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons.

46. Nevertheless, the Committee expressed its concern about the difficulties which continue to jeopardize the efforts of the countries of the subregion to combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, notably:

(a) The porosity of borders, which facilitates the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons;

(b) The lack of suitable detection equipment and adequately trained personnel;

(c) The lack of exact information and data on the type and quantities of arms in circulation.

47. The Committee urged the member countries to redouble their efforts in combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons at the national and

subregional levels and appealed to the international community to provide the countries of the subregion with the necessary support for effectively combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Report on the Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons

48. The Committee took note of the report by the Director of the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa at the Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, held in New York from 26 June to 6 July 2006. It regretted that the Conference had been unable to adopt its final document and reaffirmed its support for the Programme of Action.

Report on the international instrument on identification and tracing

49. The Committee took note of the report by the Director of the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa on the international instrument on identification and tracing adopted in December 2005 upon the completion of the work of the Open-ended Working Group set up by the General Assembly on the question.

Participation by ECCAS in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and in the standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures

50. The Committee took note of the report by the Director of the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa on the United Nations Register of Conventional Weapons and the standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures. It deplored the weak participation on the part of member countries in these instruments for promoting disarmament and urged them to respond to the requests by the United Nations Secretary-General concerning the drawing up and transmission of reports.

Implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) in Central Africa

51. The Committee took note of the report by the Director of the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) in Central Africa, which highlighted the danger of terrorism and trafficking in nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and their vectors. It welcomed the idea of holding in the subregion a seminar on the implementation of resolution 1540 (2004) in Central Africa, which would be organized jointly by ECCAS and the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa. However, it stressed the need to keep the issue of small arms and light weapons at the top of the list of priorities in the field of disarmament in Central Africa.

Establishment of a subregional disarmament mechanism in Central Africa

52. The Committee took note of the report by the Director of the Regional Centre on the experience of other African regions which already have legal instruments for

controlling small arms and light weapons. It stressed the need for Central Africa to develop similar instruments and welcomed the contacts under way between the ECCAS general secretariat and the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa relating to the launching of negotiations between the countries of the subregion in order to draw up such an instrument.

VI. Report on the activities of the ECCAS secretariat in the areas of peace and security; progress report on the early warning mechanism for Central Africa (MARAC) study

53. The Committee noted with interest the report submitted by the ECCAS general secretariat on its activities in the areas of peace and security and particularly on progress made in operationalizing the early warning mechanism for Central Africa (MARAC). It welcomed the appointment of a representative of the ECCAS Secretary-General responsible for monitoring the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It appealed to the international community to provide ECCAS with the necessary support for the deployment of election observers in member countries.

54. The Committee also welcomed the operationalization of MARAC being carried out with the support of the European Union (4 million euros), particularly the launching by the general secretariat of the process of recruiting the officials necessary for starting the mechanism's activities, namely the Director (Coordinator) of MARAC, the Director of Political and Diplomatic Actions, the Head of the Monitoring and Information Collection Office, the Head of the Analysis and Evaluation Office, and the expert specialist in information technology and document management, as well as setting up and equipping 18 new offices.

VII. Exchange of views on methods of work and the programme of work: revitalization of the activities of the Advisory Committee and adoption of the Committee's programme of work for the period 2006-2007

55. The members of the Committee, together with the Committee's secretariat and the ECCAS secretariat, engaged in an intensive exchange of views on the revitalization of the Advisory Committee's activities and the rationalization of its methods of work. They underscored the importance of holding the Committee's meetings on a rotating basis in the countries of Central Africa as a factor for strengthening confidence and welcomed the existence of the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Yaounde, which could serve as an alternative solution, in case of the withdrawal of a State, in order to host meetings of the Committee.

56. The Committee included the following activities on its programme of work for the period 2006-2007:

(a) The organization of the twenty-fifth ministerial meeting of the Committee in Sao Tome in March 2007, on dates to be determined;

(b) The organization of the Subregional Conference on Responses to the Problems of Transborder Security in Central Africa, Yaounde, on dates to be determined;

(c) The organization of the twenty-sixth ministerial meeting of the Committee in Angola in September or October 2007, on dates to be determined.

57. The Committee gave a mandate to its Bureau to approach the Department for Disarmament Affairs in order to have an exchange of views on revitalizing and rationalizing the Committee's activities, particularly the frequency and venue of its meetings. It expressed its profound concern at the lack of available resources in the Trust Fund for financing its extrabudgetary activities. In that regard, it launched an appeal urging member countries and donors to contribute generously to the Trust Fund.

VIII. Date and place of the next meeting

58. The Committee decided to hold its twenty-fifth ministerial meeting in Sao Tome and Principe in March 2007, the dates for which will be agreed upon by the secretariat and the host country.

IX. Other matters

59. The Committee urged the member countries that had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the agreements on cooperation in mutual legal assistance and in the field of criminal and trans-border police.

60. It warmly congratulated Pamela Maponga, the Secretary of the Committee, for the competence and devotion with which she carried out her duties.

61. In conclusion, the participants expressed satisfaction with the good atmosphere that had prevailed throughout their work and conveyed their gratitude to Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, and to the Rwandan Government and people for the warm welcome and kind hospitality that they had received during their stay in the Republic of Rwanda.